DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 438 074 PS 028 275

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TITLE Yes You Can: Meeting Individual Needs in a Diverse Primary Classroom.

INSTITUTION Mineral Point Unified School District, WI.
SPONS AGENCY Wisconsin State Dept. of Public Instruction, Madison.; Wisconsin Improvement Program, Madison.
PUB DATE 1998-00-00
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Action Research; *Flexible Scheduling; Grade 1; *Instructional Innovation; Primary Education; *Program Effectiveness; *Teacher Interns; Teacher Morale; Teacher Student Ratio; Team Teaching

ABSTRACT

Mineral Point Elementary School in Wisconsin initiated an instruction and internship program among its first-grade teaching team. The program aimed to assure that first- and second-graders developed reading and language arts competencies, math readiness, and social and work habits that will lead to outstanding literacy abilities. A key factor in the program was the use of an intern to reduce student-teacher ratio, which in turn enabled flexible grouping and other instruction methods. Action research conducted on the 1996-97 program studied the effects of the teaming of teachers with an intern. Checklists, observations, teacher interviews, and test scores (Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, Houghton Mifflin Leveled Theme Tests, baseline assessment scores) were used. Findings indicated positive impacts on instructional innovation, student achievement (44 percent increase in baseline assessment), and teacher and student morale. (EV)

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Yes You Can:

Meeting Individual Needs in a Diverse Primary Classroom

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This report was funded in part by the Wisconsin Improvement Program, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

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PRIDE IN EDUCATION

SUMMARY

Mineral Point Elementary School's first grade teaching team has initiated an innovative instruction and internship program that is designed to help students get off to an excellent start in school. The teachers are working to assure that first and second graders develop reading and language arts competencies, math readiness, social development and work habits that will lead to outstanding literacy abilities.

In order to achieve this goal, the team has incorporated an intern as a fourth member of the team. These four people worked collaboratively to improve instructional effectiveness which impacts student achievement and teacher-student morale. An outstanding benefit of this program is that teacher-student ratio is decreased in a variety of ways throughout the school day.

As teacher-student ratio is decreased, there are several effects including the following:

1. Instruction

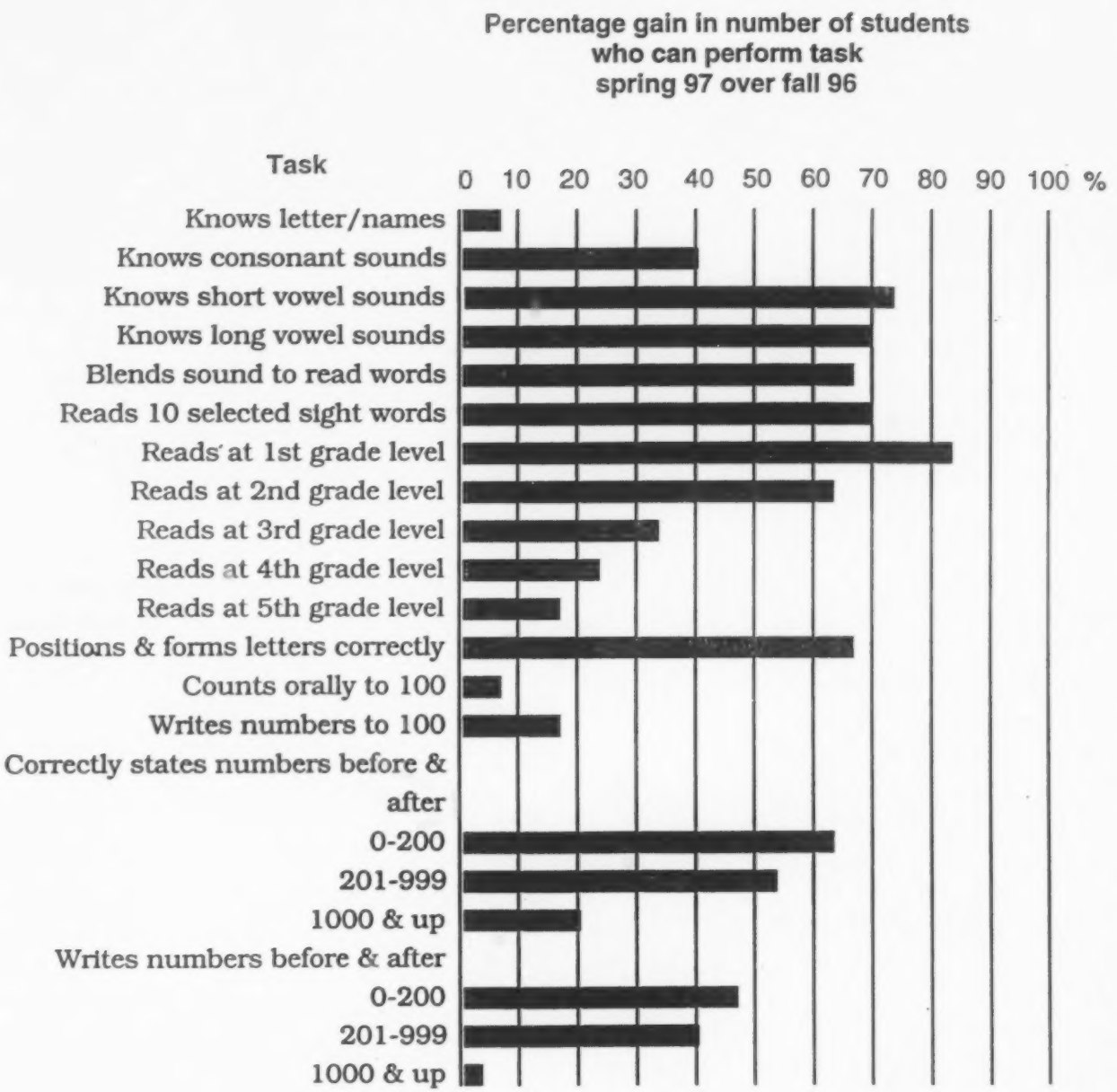
A. Flexible grouping allows teachers to provide for developmentally appropriate instruction to meet the diverse needs of students. The classroom atmosphere is more positive in smaller groups.
B. Team collaboration enables improvement of instructional techniques.
C. The classroom atmosphere is positive because students are motivated to learn.

2. Student Achievement
A. Quality instruction positively impacts student achievement.
B. The flexible grouping has resulted in excellent student growth in reading and mathematics achievement. A baseline assessment has shown a 44 percent increase.

3. Morale
A. Team collaboration has a significant impact on the morale of teachers and students.
B. A modest reduction in teacher-student ratio has had a significant, positive effect on teacher morale.
C. A modest reduction in teacher-student ratio has had a significant, positive effect on student attitudes.

Baseline Assessment Scores. The baseline assessment score is a combination of several key language arts and math criteria selected by the team to show percentage of growth indicators. The growth is especially impressive because even children who are exceeding first grade level expectations in September are showing progressive growth. For students with limited abilities (they didn't know their letters and consonant sounds in September) growth was also accomplished. This is extremely powerful information because students are given the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Flexible grouping does much more than teach to the middle of the class. (See Table 2)

Table 2


Percentage gain in number of students who can perform task spring 97 over fall 96
Task
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 %
Knows letter/names
Knows consonant sounds
Knows short vowel sounds
Knows long vowel sounds
Blends sound to read words
Reads 10 selected sight words
Reads at 1st grade level
Reads at 2nd grade level
Reads at 3rd grade level
Reads at 4th grade level
Reads at 5th grade level
Positions & forms letters correctly
Counts orally to 100
Writes numbers to 100
Correctly states numbers before & after
0-200
201-999
1000 & up
Writes numbers before & after
0-200
201-999
1000 & up

Mineral Point Elementary School's first grade teaching team has initiated an innovative instruction and internship program that is designed to help students get off to an excellent start in school. The teachers are working to assure that first and second graders develop reading and language arts competencies, math readiness, social development and work habits that will lead to outstanding literacy abilities.

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(Most of our findings are supported by educational research, e.g., Geary, 1997.)

Instructional Content and Teaching Strategies Focus

The first grade program emphasizes basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and social skills. The literacy acquisition for reading and language arts utilizes a rich literature with phonics/decoding skills as central to the program. The Houghton Mifflin *Invitation to Literacy* series that is the core of the program utilizes interactive learning strategies that stress that students learn best when they are involved in the learning. The phonics and decoding instruction is connected to the literature and the students are involved in a variety of options that allow for applying skills through reading, writing and other activities.

The Mineral Point Elementary Plan

The Mineral Point Elementary Plan is directly related to meeting individual student needs. An intern this past year enabled the team to meet individual needs through flexible grouping and other innovative teaching strategies in all academic and social areas. For 1997-98, the projected size of the first grade class is 68. With three current teachers, the ratio will be one teacher for 23 students (1:23). By using an intern, the class size will be reduced to a ratio of one teacher for 17 students (1:17).

The Mineral Point Plan provides the intern with three mentors rather than one, the opportunity to work as a team member, and the opportunity to learn instructional strategies appropriate for working with different size groups of students.

The plan provides the opportunity for teachers to vary the instructional groups substantially so that students have the opportunity in the day to receive instruction in groups smaller than 17 students. In addition to the lower teacher-student ratio, the plan provides for teaching opportunities that include co-teaching which allows the teachers and intern to build off each other's strengths. These opportunities allow the following:

- to carefully structure learning opportunities,
- to provide instruction to students of varying abilities including students who cannot be accommodated in the Title I program,
- to provide more objective and standardized evaluation of student work for diagnostic and evaluative purposes.

Action Research

To assess the impact of the 1996-97 program and to begin planning for the '97-98 year, the first grade team and a consultant from the School of Education at UW-Platteville undertook an action research project.

"Action research takes place when teachers systematically and intentionally inquire into and reflect about their teaching practices... Action research is a tool to improve the way teachers work and perform tasks, or to obtain knowledge or new skills. Many teachers... have found that action research is the best way to investigate how they think about, design, and deliver... curriculum."

Further action research is based on the belief that "teachers who performed their own research are more likely to change existing classroom practices because the changes would be a direct result of what they learned." (Peppard, 1997, p. 56).

Research Focus

The research focus of the Mineral Point Plan was to study the effects of the teaming of teachers with an intern program.

Data Collection

From the several tools suggested by Peppard (1997), four were used for the report.

Checklists
Observations
Teacher interviews
Test scores

Test scores for the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, Houghton Mifflin Reading Test, and report card checklist evaluations were available.

The tools suggested by Peppard were used by the consultant in a day and a half-day of observation.

Data Report

Teacher-student ratio. A variety of teacher-student ratios exist throughout a typical day. Table 1 is observed information by the consultant. The sample illustrates the flexible teacher-student ratios that are achieved by careful planning.

Table 1
Teacher-Student Ratio

8:00 - 8:30	**Opening**	Room	Teacher	Students
		110	1 teacher	19 children
		112	1 teacher	18 children
		111	1 teacher	17 children
8:30 - 9:35	**Whole Group**			
		110	1:18	
		111	1:17 (1:6, 1:11)	
		112	1:19	
9:50 - 10:20				
		112	1:16)	
		111	1:6 1:6	
		110	1:14	
		114	Title I: 2:12	

10:20 - 10:55 **Language Arts Flexible Grouping**
1:9 1:13 1:12 1:12, then 1:7 1:5

11:45 - 12:00 **Story time**
1:19 1:19 1:18

12:30 - 1:05	**Math**	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4
		1:16	1:18	1:19	
1:05	**Math Flexible Grouping**				
		1:16	2:11	1:14	1:15

2:15 **Center Time**

Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3
1:19	1:19	1:18
4/listening to taped story	3/listening to taped story	3/computer
4/art & craft	5/art & craft	4/book on tape
4/newsprint sibling activity	4/newsprint sibling activity	4/art & craft
4/high frequency go fish	3/go fish	4/go fish
3/computer	4/computer	3/newsprint sibling activity

Learning Opportunities

The Mineral Point Plan allows for increased learning opportunities for the children and increased contact with the teachers. During the course of a day of observation, the consultant observed a variety of activities that illustrate the opportunities and contact the children have with their teachers. The opportunities include the following:

- students read aloud in full class and small groups
- students work in small groups on word attack skills
- students work in reading pairs
- independent teacher-student meeting for diagnosis (miscue analysis)
- teacher reading and student listening
- individual reading
- use of a variety of books within a group
- word cards
- rewriting of a story to make it more varied in writing style
- phonic sounding
- group writing activities
- estimating numbers
- map reading
- calendar and time activities
- spelling words
- question and answer
- equations concepts
- gym
- music
- recess

To address learning opportunities in addition to documenting the activities noted, Special attention was given to student analysis of teacher questions and interviews with the teachers.

Teacher Questions. Teacher questions may be considered as emphasizing recall or helping students to engage in higher order thinking such as relating and predicting. Four samples of teacher questions were collected in the day. The observations fit the lesson and the length of the observations varied from five to 10 minutes. The first observation was a lesson preparing the students to read a story. Seven questions were asked. One question was recall (e.g., What is a family?) and the other seven were higher order questions (e.g., How do families show love?) The second observation was of questions asked as a story was being read aloud to the students. Seventeen questions were asked. One question was recall (e.g., What is the name for bear babies?) and 16 were higher order questions (e.g., How do you think he is feeling? Predict in your head...). The third observation was a math lesson. Ten questions were asked. One was classroom management (e.g., Where are you _____?) and the other nine were higher order questions (e.g., Is that close to 6? Can you get closer?).

Teacher Interviews. The interviews with the teachers and the intern address effects on student learning opportunities and teacher morale. In individual interviews, the teachers were in agreement about the view of all of the "kids" in first grade as their students. The "kids" know all of the teachers

and all of the other "kids." The value of teaming was expressed by one teacher who said that "working as a team means we work together, we keep records and compare notes." As another teacher said, we "do what is best for kids and that is what we give attention to... and by meeting together we know what they need."

The interview with the intern illustrated that the Mineral Point Plan provides an excellent opportunity for the blending of theory and practice as well as experiences the university does not provide. The intern was especially impressed with the complementary nature of her college classes in emergent literacy and methodology in cooperative learning and the experiences she had at Mineral Point. At Mineral Point she learned new skills and content related to phonics and using a basal reader that combined various approaches to instruction. The dynamics of working on a team and having three teachers to provide feedback on her work were especially appreciated. The intern listed many things she had done and skills she had acquired including whole group instruction, math techniques using manipulatives and cooperative learning, learning the various learning styles of the students, getting along in a team, knowing 56 students, teaching in small groups, working with students at different levels, acquiring flexibility, learning a new literature and working with the Houghton Mifflin series. Each of these speaks to the learning opportunities provided for the students.

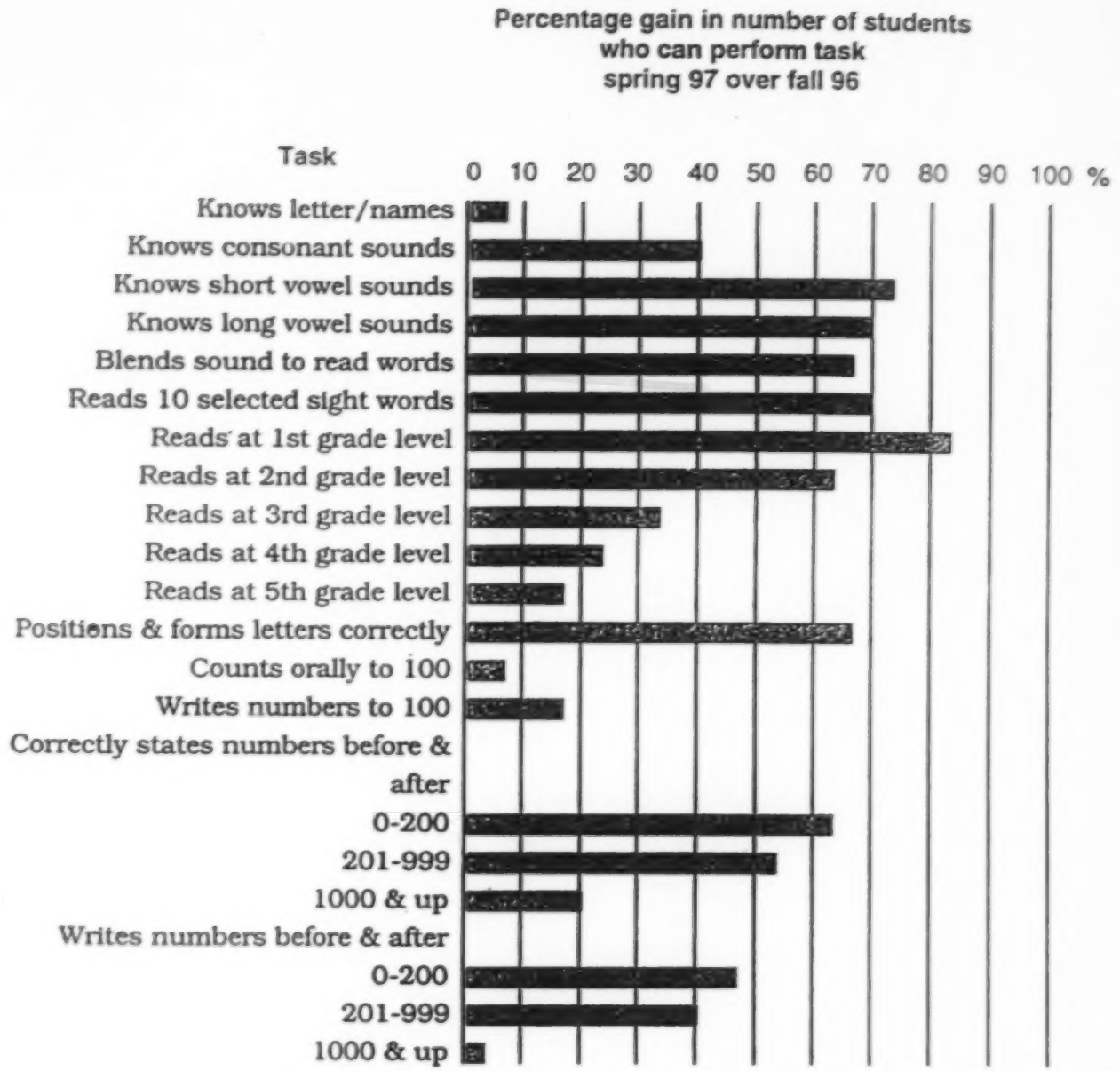
Test Scores

The three key assessments used were the baseline assessment scores, Houghton Mifflin level theme tests, and Gates-MacGinitie reading test.

Baseline Assessment Scores. The baseline assessment score is a combination of several key language arts and math criteria selected by the team to show percentage of growth indicators. The growth is especially impressive because even children who are exceeding first grade level expectations in September are showing progressive growth. For students with limited abilities (they didn't know their letters and consonant sounds in Septe ıber) growth was also accomplished. This is extremely powerful information because students are given the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Flexible grouping does much more than teach to the middle of the class. (See Table 2)

Houghton Mifflin Leveled Theme Tests. These tests integrate reading strategies, comprehension, phonics/decoding, writing, and language. They can be adapted to meet individual needs. The tests were consistently scored using a scoring rubric developed by Houghton Mifflin. They were given at the completion of each of the five levels in the Houghton Mifflin reading series. (See Table 3.)

Table 2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Blends sound to read words
Reads 10 selected sight words
Reads at 1st grade level
Reads at 2nd grade level
Reads at 3rd grade level
Reads at 4th grade level
Reads at 5th grade level
Positions & forms letters correctly
Counts orally to 100
Writes numbers to 100
Correctly states numbers before & after
0-200
201-999
1000 & up
Writes numbers before & after
0-200
201-999
1000 & up

Table 3
Houghton Mifflin Reading Tests - Average Scores 1996-97

Theme Test Level	Date	Average Scores*
1-1	11/15	90.3
1-2	1/14	89.2
1-3	3/18	92.1
1-4	5/2	91.4
1-5	5/20	91.9

*Scale (provided by publisher) 90-100, Excellent; 75-89, Good; 60-74, Satisfactory; 0-59, Needs Improvement

Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test. The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test is a nationally normed test that tests phonics/decoding skills and reading comprehension. The percentage score on a nationally normed test compares an individual student's score with those scores of students nationally. Thus a 50% would mean that this student scored above 50% of all students nationally who took the same test.

The table below provides information about the total average percentile for first grade classes of 1995, 1996 and 1997. The purpose of this information is to follow class performance throughout their elementary years. It is inappropriate to compare one class to another because individual class composition.

Table 4
Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test Scores

	Gates-MacGinitie Test Scores Total Average Percentile
Spring 1995	64%
Spring 1996	52%
Spring 1997	61%
	Number of Students Below 40% Average Percentile
Spring 1995	14 of 53 students
Spring 1996	26 of 66 students
Spring 1997	14 of 54 students (2 EEN*) *scores not included

Next Steps

There are several actions to consider to continue the work started in 1996-97. Among the possible next steps are the following:

- Exemplary teaching strategies need to be shared with other faculty.

- Work samples that illustrate units need to be collected for each theme to document student progress.

- Student time-on-task samples need to be collected throughout the year to continue monitoring student growth.

- A continuing analysis should be done of teacher questioning style to foster higher order thinking.

- The 1996-97 first grade should be studied longitudinally to show the long-term effects of the intern program.

- Additional action research tools should be considered to further develop studies of the effectiveness of this program.

- Pre-and post-interviews of the intern(s) should be conducted to determine the success of the experience.

References

Geary, S. (1988) Class size in Utah. An occasional policy paper from the Graduate School of Education. Salt Lake City: University of Utah.

Peppard, J. (1997) A guide to connected curriculum and action research. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Bulletin No. 97177.

Appendices

La Crosse

March 6, 1997

Mineral Point Board of Education

To whom it may concern:

I would like to support the Mineral Point Elementary School faculty and principal in their request to continue the teaching internship with the first grade team.

The three teachers (Mrs. Kelp, Mrs. Roberts and Mrs. Wiegel) involved are great teachers and wonderful role models for a young person coming into the teaching profession. The addition of an intern allows the team to plan activities and groupings which are greatly facilitated by the extra supervision and assistance the intern can provide.

The four person team (3 rooms, 3 teachers and one intern) is now providing a wonderful teaching /learning environment. It is such a pleasure to visit a classroom and find all the children happy, busy, and learning.

The Mineral Point Board of Education should be congratulated for their participation and assistance in the teacher preparation program in the state of Wisconsin. Providing a teaching internship for the 1996-97 academic year has been greatly appreciated by the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse teacher education faculty. Thank-you.

Sincerely,

Bob Gowlland

Dr. Bob Gowlland

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Mineral Point Elementary School

Grade 1

Number of Title I Students:	Eligible	Accepted
1994	34	14
1995	20	9
1996	24	12

Number of EEN Students	Referred	Placed	Category(ies)
1994	2	2	1 CD, 1 LD
1995	6	6	4 LD, 1 ED, 1 CD
1996	2	2	1 CD, 1 LD

Number of free/reduced lunch members

	Free	Reduced	Total
1994	42	22	64
1995	40	13	53
1996	44	9	53

Grade 2

Number of Title I Students:	Eligible	Accepted
1994	20	11
1995	29	15
1996	14	11